United Nations ST/AI/1999/2

# Secretariat

13 May 1999

## Administrative instruction

### Language proficiency and language incentives*

The Under-Secretary-General for Management, pursuant to section 4.2 of Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/1997/1, promulgates the following:

**Section 1**

**General principles**

Staff members are strongly encouraged to become proficient in two or more official languages of the United Nations in order to achieve and maintain linguistic balance in the Organization. Language proficiency for the purposes of the present instruction shall be established in accordance with the conditions set out in sections 2 and 3 below. Once a staff member has established such proficiency, he or she may receive a monetary language incentive, under conditions set out in section 4 below.

**Section 2**

**Language proficiency**

2.1 For the purposes of this instruction, adequate and demonstrated knowledge in one of the official languages of the United Nations shall be established by means of a language proficiency certificate awarded by the United Nations upon the staff member's successfully passing the United Nations language proficiency examination (LPE) in that language.

2.2 However, the LPE requirement shall be waived in the following cases:

(a) Staff members whose mother tongue is one of the official languages of the United Nations need not take the LPE in that language. They may demonstrate adequate knowledge in another official language by passing the LPE in any of those languages, including that in which they are required to be proficient by the terms of their appointment;

(b) Staff members whose mother tongue is not one of the official languages of the United Nations need not take the LPE in the language in which they are required to be proficient by the terms of their appointment. They may demonstrate adequate knowledge in another official language by passing the LPE in any of those languages, except that in which they are required to be proficient by the terms of their appointment;

* *Personnel Manual* index No. 4410.

99-14035 (E) 180599

(c) Additionally, the following staff members need not take the LPE in order to qualify for the accelerated increments under section 4 of this instruction:

(i) Staff previously appointed to posts with special language requirements who are promoted or placed against a post subject to the system of desirable ranges;

(ii) Staff previously in receipt of a language allowance under section 4.1 of this instruction who, upon promotion to the Professional category, become eligible for accelerated increments under section 4.3 of this instruction.

**Section 3**

**Conditions governing language proficiency examinations**

*Eligibility to take the LPE*

3.1 The LPE is open to all individuals who were admitted to participate in a United Nations language course, after they have completed the highest level of that course.

3.2 Additionally, and for staff members only, the LPE may be taken by staff members appointed under any series of the Staff Rules who have not attended or completed a United Nations language course but can document that they possess an equivalent knowledge of the language in which they wish to be tested. Such equivalent knowledge may be demonstrated by language study outside the United Nations for at least two years or use of the language on a regular basis for school or work.

3.3 Staff members serving on a short-term appointment, an appointment of limited duration, or a fixed-term appointment expiring prior to the date of the LPE for which they are applying may take the LPE only with authorization from their Executive Officer or the head of administration at offices away from Headquarters and field offices.

3.4 The office responsible for administering the LPE at each duty station shall ensure that the above eligibility requirements are met.

*Applications*

3.5 Candidates for the LPE who meet the conditions set out above in the present section shall complete the appropriate application form and submit it with all required documentation in accordance with procedures set out in the information circular announcing upcoming examinations.

*Requirements for passing the LPE*

3.6 The LPE shall consist of a written part and an oral part, which shall be taken at the same session.

3.7 A minimum score of 65 per cent in both parts shall be required for a passing grade. Where candidates receive a score of 80 per cent or more on the written examination but fail the oral, the jury adjudicating the examination shall review the case and may allow candidates to retain their written score for the following examination session. In this event, the candidate shall receive written notification of the jury's decision and will be required to apply to retake the oral examination only at the following session.

3.8 Candidates who receive 80 per cent or more on the oral part but fail the written part, and candidates who have taken only one part of the examination at one session shall retake both the written and oral parts at a subsequent session.

**Section 4**

**Language incentives**

*Language allowance*

4.1 Staff members appointed under the 100 series of the Staff Rules to posts in the General Service, Security or Trades and Crafts categories, or in the Field Service category up to and including level 5, shall be paid a language allowance in accordance with staff rule 103.6 after they have established proficiency in at least two official United Nations languages in accordance with section 2 of this instruction, unless the entitlement is specifically excluded in appendix B to the Staff Rules applicable to the duty station or in the conditions of service for locally recruited staff at special missions.

4.2 The language allowance shall be paid to a staff member who has met the conditions of section 4.1 of this instruction as of the first of the month following the month in which the staff member successfully passed the LPE.

*Accelerated increments*

4.3 Staff members appointed under the 100 series of the Staff Rules to posts in the Professional category and above and who are subject to the system of desirable ranges shall be eligible for accelerated increments after they have established proficiency in a second language. Ineligible staff members include, in particular:

(a) Staff appointed to posts with special language requirements up to and including the P-5 level;

(b) Staff whose appointment is limited to service with a particular mission, office, fund or programme, including staff appointed by a voluntarily funded programme and staff appointed to posts financed from the peacekeeping support account;

(c) Staff appointed, after inter-agency consultation, to posts financed on an inter-agency basis;

(d) Staff seconded away from a post subject to the system of desirable ranges, for the period of their secondment;

(e) Staff detailed or assigned to technical assistance projects under staff rule 200.1;

(f) Staff who have been exceptionally authorized to retain their status as permanent residents in a country other than that of their nationality.

Additionally, Professional staff on special leave with partial pay or without pay shall be ineligible for accelerated increments for the duration of their special leave.

4.4 Subject to satisfactory service, staff members eligible for accelerated increments shall be allowed to pass through the steps within each grade at intervals between steps of 10 months instead of 12 for grades and levels where the normal qualifying period for in-grade increment is one year. The intervals between steps shall be reduced to 20 months for grades and levels where the normal qualifying period for in-grade increment is two years.

4.5 Eligibility for accelerated increments shall become effective as of the first of the month following the month in which the staff member successfully passed the LPE. For implementation purposes, the increment that would have otherwise been granted in the course of the following year shall normally be granted two or four months earlier, as appropriate, provided, however, that the first accelerated increment shall not be given back to a period prior to the effective date of eligibility for accelerated increments. Thereafter,

increments shall be awarded, subject to satisfactory service, after 10 or 20 months, as appropriate.

**Section 5**

**Final provisions**

5.1 This administrative instruction shall come into force on 15 May 1999.

5.2 Administrative instructions ST/AI/113 of 2 March 1956 and ST/AI/207 of 23 December 1971 and information circular ST/IC/1997/23 of 8 April 1997 are hereby abolished.

*(Signed)* Joseph E. **Connor**
Under-Secretary-General for Management